

# Aliens Among Us

**B**EHIND THE WINDOWED DOOR of an aging walk-up in Inman Square, a creaking staircase leads to a different world. Here, John E. Mack, a 64-year-old lanky Harvard psychiatrist with a hurried gait, insists that what you can imagine is more important than what you can prove. And that includes abductions by aliens.

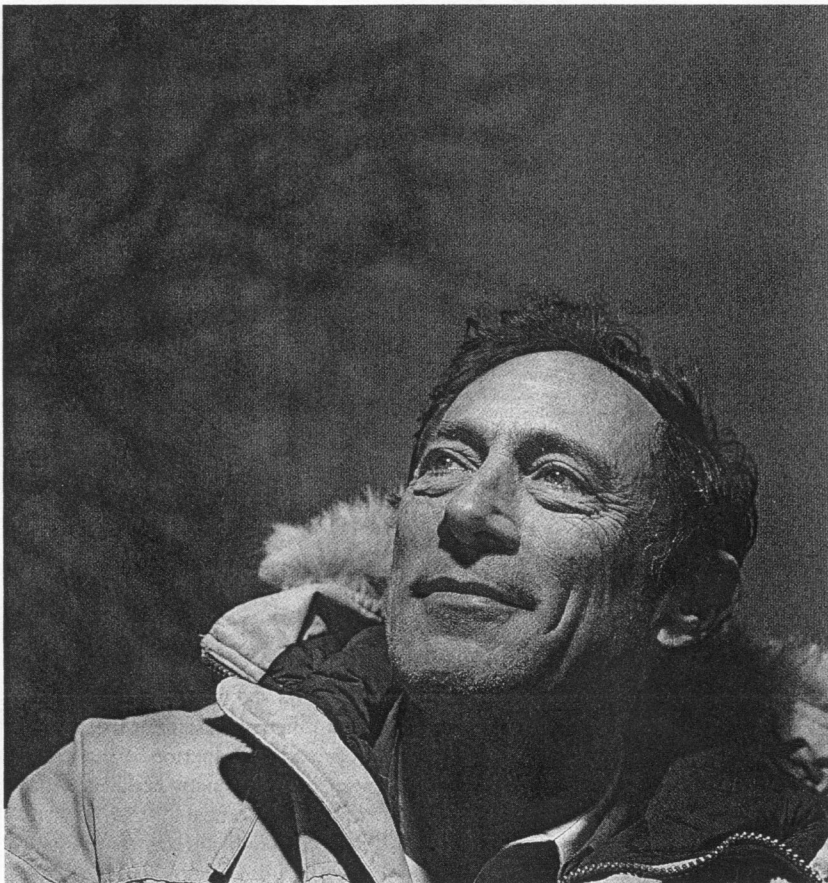
Welcome to the headquarters of the Program for Extraordinary Experience Research. PEER—a carefully chosen acronym—is the product of four years of Mack's listening to the accounts of men, women, and children who think that they were kidnapped by aliens and taken to laboratories for physical inspection and manipulation—often of a sexual nature. What started out as a small support group in Mack's Chestnut Hill home is now sustained by a grant of about \$200,000 from the Human Potential Foundation—a research and educational foundation for spiritual and psychological development—to set up a professional forum for the discussion and study of alien contact.

Mack, formerly the business-minded director of the psychiatry department at Harvard-affiliated Cambridge Hospital, came to the alien issue only recently, after he had devoted decades to such political issues as nuclear weapons competition and global ecology. And to writing. In 1977 he won a Pulitzer Prize for *A Prince of Our Disorder*, a biography of T. E. Lawrence. His latest book, *Abduction*, is to be published by Charles Scribner's Sons this month.

Mack's obsession with otherworldly experience began in January 1990. Budd Hopkins, an artist and author of *Intruders*—a book that was made in May 1992 into a two-part CBS documentary about the experiences of abductees—invited Mack to his New York home to observe his clients' hypnotic regressions. Mack watched skeptically as Hopkins hypnotized four "experiencers." He listened as they described with great emotion a series of abduction sequences carried out by aliens. By the end of the day, Mack was more than fascinated; he was hooked.

He returned to Boston and, three months later, opened his office to experiencers. Soon Mack was conducting his own hypnotic regressions and learning to coax his troubled clients into letting go of what he calls their repressed memories. Now, four years later, he has met with about 80 clients. Many tell similar tales of repeated traumatic abductions and unwelcome genital probes.

Although he was trained in conventional psychiatry, Mack is convinced that the alien abduction phenomenon cannot be explained in



**UPWARD AND INWARD: Psychiatrist John E. Mack helps abductees recall their ordeals.**

*When will the  
flying saucers  
finally touch down?  
A Cambridge  
psychiatrist believes  
they're already here.*

**By Amy Ruth Levine**

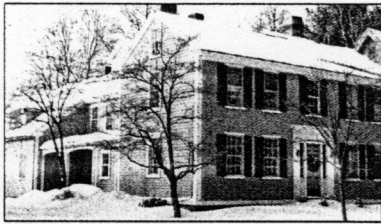
the terms of that discipline. Contrary to what many of his science-minded colleagues believe, Mack insists that accounts of alien contact are not symptoms of dementia, dreams, or fantasies.

"These are healthy, normal people," says Mack. "If you get someone who is really delusional and encourage them to tell their stories, they tend to get worse. These people—once they get a listener to share in the mystery—do extremely well and experience great relief."

Mack personally screens potential clients for signs of mental instability, dismisses those whose mental health is questionable, and then gets down to the business of listening to the remainders' stories. Aside from two UFO-related comic strips taped to the wall, his office holds few clues as to what drives him. There is the requisite couch with a multitude of throw pillows, Oriental and Indian artwork, a few awards from psychiatric societies, and a small bookshelf overstocked with texts. On a small table in the corner of the room, a

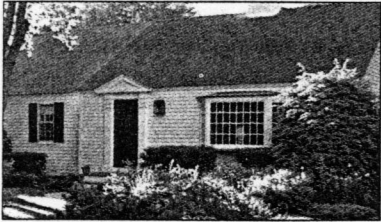
16 YEARS OF SUPERIOR SERVICE

 **Barrett & Co.**



**CONCORD: Historic Ambiance**

Handsome and thoroughly enchanting Federalist Colonial built in 1835 by Nathan Hosmer and Isaac Culter. Brimming with Antique charm featuring 13 spacious rooms, 6 bedrooms and large barn-style garage. An extraordinary offering at \$659,000.



**CONCORD: A Perfect Family Retreat**

Enjoy comfort and elegance in this stunning and recently expanded cape in a choice neighborhood location. Quality and taste predominate in this lovely and newly decorated home. Magnificent new addition with grand family and dining rooms. Picture pretty landscaped grounds. \$525,000



**CONCORD: Location and Neighborhood**

Elegance prevails throughout this beautifully designed home in one of Concord's most sought after executive neighborhoods. Within, this home suggests perfection in entertaining with its expansive formal rooms yet boasts a warm and inviting family living atmosphere. New bright Cherry wood Kitchen with Butler's Pantry. Dining Room with adjoining Sun Room, wide wood moldings and a host of other amenities. Call for price.



**CONCORD: Premier Location: A Nature Lover's Paradise**

A rare Nashawtic Neighborhood Location—just one mile from Concord Center. Dramatically sited custom built home on 11 acres boasting panoramic meadow, pond and woodland vistas. Magnificent indoor pool, art studio and private au-pair quarters. A nature enthusiast's haven. Possible sub-divisible lot. \$1,595,000

UNIQUE HOMES  
  
Referral  
NETWORK

33 Walden Street  
Concord, MA 01742  
508-369-6453

15 Lowell Road  
Carlisle, MA 01741  
508-371-3110

1-800-842-9555, Ext. 220  
Member Realty Guild

For full personal service, selection and consistent performance, call Barrett & Co.,... proven to be "ONE STEP AHEAD."

## Local Color

pile of new cassette tapes waits to record his clients' tales.

**A** TYPICAL STORY, SAYS MACK, might go like this: a woman driving—usually alone—spots a ball of light. She pulls over, gets out of the car, and wanders in the direction of the light, as if in a trance. Gray humanoids with almond-shaped black eyes greet her and lead her into a laboratory on their spacecraft. Inside, she may see other human beings. She is strapped on a table and coerced into relaxation by telepathic communication. Sometimes the hypnosis reveals horror; other times, mechanical obedience.

The woman is probed with metal instruments designed to extract an egg or, from male subjects, sperm. The aliens may insert a burning needle into her spine or neck. She may be subjected to "Mindscan," the aliens' deep staring into the eyes that causes intense fear and cathartic sensations of trust. Many experiencers report sexual arousal and actual intercourse with aliens. Most say they can easily distinguish between male and female aliens. When the abductee is unstrapped, she is often led into a nursery, where she is made to watch and coddle what she describes as hybrid babies—part human, part alien. Almost always, she senses that the child she is coddling is hers.

After she is released, her watch reveals lost time, and she may realize that she is driving on a different road than the one she was on before the abduction. When experiencers were in the company of other people, they describe their companions as "shut off" or immobilized until their return. Usually neither party is immediately aware that something strange just happened. Much later, however, the abductee may experience flashbacks of her abduction. A vague remembrance of the trauma will nag her. That, says Mack, is when most of his clients come to PEER, where he helps them recount the episode. Mack admits his frustration in persuading society that the abduction phenomenon is real.

"For such an astonishing claim," says Barry Karr, the executive director of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, "you need astonishing evidence." Karr's magazine, *Skeptical Inquirer*, has published numerous articles that discount Mack's theories. A few attribute the similarity of the abduction stories to "false memory syndrome," a result of systematic convincing that something has happened, which has not. The scant evidence that Mack describes—a few cuts, scrapes, stains, and scoop marks on abductees' skin—elicits chuckles from hard scientists.

"The smoking-gun philosophy of wanting real evidence keeps us from understand-

ing other levels of consciousness," replies Mack. "We are afraid to change the way we see reality. We are simply not the only intelligent life in the cosmos. No other civilization believed that we were the only intelligent life in the universe, but this notion challenges the Western materialistic mind."

Despite his detractors, Mack has a great many people on his side. Since the first documented UFO sightings in 1947 and the widely reported 1961 abduction of the New Hampshire couple—Betty and Barney Hill—abduction theories have been bubbling to the surface of popular discourse. For the past 13 years, the University of Wyoming has hosted the Rocky Mountain Conference on UFO Investigation, where hundreds of experiencers and scholars from around the world gather to exchange stories and theories.

That Rocky Mountain Conference draws people like Joe Noonan—a client of Mack's—who runs a consulting firm on the North Shore, and who believes that there is much to be gained from alien contact.

Although he is wary of alarming his own clients, Noonan speaks out about his visits from aliens because he believes his report will alleviate the stigma associated with UFO reports. His message: aliens won't hurt us and we should learn from them how to save our planet from ecological destruction. (Messages of environmental conservation are common among experiencers.) But this positive attitude toward alien intervention is not shared by all experiencers. Some, terrified by their flashbacks, fear that aliens are conducting a systematic harvesting of human genes to create their own species.

No one on Mack's reverent crew will reveal whether he or she is an experiencer except Mack himself, who acknowledges that he has never seen a UFO. "It's better that way," Mack says. "I'd be disqualified as biased if I had."

Mack and his staff know that in the eyes of much of the scientific world, they are disqualified as biased anyway. Last year the MIT Museum and the *Journal of Irreproducible Results* awarded Mack an Ig Nobel Prize—the gag award—for "a leaping conclusion that people who think they have been kidnapped by aliens from outer space probably have." So the staff takes care to protect their reputations. The program's researcher, a Ph.D. candidate, declined to give her name out of concern that her professors would hold her affiliation with PEER against her. Employees answer questions about the program reluctantly. PEER has, they know, a long way to go before their reason for existing is commonly accepted. Of course, they also know, the aliens had a long way to go, too. **B**